

**Kachemak Bay An Exploration of People and
Place Education Project**

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>> RYJIL CHRISTIANSON: We were at the end of the road but at the beginning of Kachemak Bay. And so this is a jumping off point where you get onto a small boat or a small plane and you discover remote Alaska.

>> ARON CROWELL: The Pratt is a community museum in every sense of the word. The great advantage and mission of a museum like that is to reflect the rich local diversity of cultures and voices and historical stories that are there.

Chanting

>> RYJIL CHRISTIANSON: Back in 2003, we opened this beautiful exhibit Kachemak Bay: An Exploration of People and Place. It was question-based and it was really utilizing science, art, and culture to explore the story of who are we, how are we informed by our place, and how do we shape our place. What we realized as we opened this exhibit is that it was cutting-edge, it was well received, but yet we had an education program that all of a sudden was incredibly outdated and didn't match with our new wonderful exhibits. Our staff quickly scrambled and looked to revitalize our education program.

That's what we look at here at the Pratt Museum. We're focused in on Kachemak Bay and we look at the science, the art, and the culture.

Our exhibits director, our museum director, and our curator got together and created a grant which was funded through the Museums for America in 2005.

A glacier just coming through and just scraping the ground. And then as it retreats, it leaves a moraine, a pile of debris in front of it.

>> Yeah, we learned about that.

>> RYJIL CHRISTIANSON: There you go.

Bones. We take care of bones. Yes.

>> FEMALE SPEAKER: And you take care of bears.

>> RYJIL CHRISTIANSON: We do. Our stuffed bear.

Kachemak Bay, Science, Art, and Culture is a very big mission. And if you look at all age learners, it can be daunting. So what we did was we had this guiding document that really outlined how we were going to meet the terms of our grant and also be true to our mission and develop an education framework that would serve us well in the future. And in that we started to outline that important story, keeping it story-based because stories are intriguing and they make information accessible to everyone.

Octopus. You can call him egghead. He's quite a bright invertebrate. That means doesn't have a backbone.

We were able to experiment because what we learned more than anything with the education program, you just have to try things out and see how they're received by audiences.

So let's pretend like we're an octopus. I think I'm just going to - oh my gosh. And you might even slowly move around, right? Pretend like you're the octopus in the tank. You have no bones.

Thanks to the Museums for America grant, we had the funding to help grow an education department. But those funds were available for a short time. If we used that time to really grow partnerships, when the Museums for America grant ran out, we could continue to grow that program. One of the programs that was started during this grant time period was the Science-Art Collaborative.

>> TERRY THOMPSON: We do the science really well; the Pratt does the art side really well as well as the natural history. But to really mesh those, it was kind of one of those things that once the idea got started, I think it really generated a lot of interest. The first one was called Microscopic Ocean Art. So all of a sudden now you're asking artists to start producing

works of art that are off of things that you can't see with the naked eye. Every month we would go out, we would conduct plankton tows in the bay, we'd bring in the samples, and then the artists were given science lessons on plankton.

>> RYJIL CHRISTIANSON: It would not have been possible had it not been for that grant because it really took a lot of staff time in that first go around to make it work, to schedule the programming, to work with partners, to coordinate all the artists, to provide all of these workshops that would make sure that they were responding through their art in a scientifically appropriate way.

>> TERRY THOMPSON: After they learned about the plankton, they would sit in here with microscopes and look at what was there. It was like a whole new world all of a sudden opened up in front of them because they paint pictures of the beautiful mountains and the seascapes and now all of a sudden it was like, wow, look what is living in the ocean. It was just fun to watch the whole process come together. The opening that night at the Pratt, I mean, it was packed.

>> ARON CROWELL: Any kind of cultural program or cultural-historical program has to have a long timeframe. It has to unfold over a number of years because you're working with communities, you have to be known, there has to be continuity, there has to be good communication, people have to build trust, they have to see that what they are contributing to comes back to the community and helps with their own education of their children, it's in their schools. I think the Pratt has been able to maintain that sort of relationship over several decades and they've been steady. They've been continuous and that's the key.

>> RYJIL CHRISTIANSON: Today we're going to meet Michael Opheim. He's going to be showing us to his museum which is housing and caring for their own artifacts. Very exciting. And we're very proud to help support that and maintain those collections. We hope to see that museum grow over time.

This reminds me of where we did that education program a couple years ago with the kids.

>> MICHAEL OPHEIM: This is Windy River coming down through here. It's a salmon stream. No fish up above here because of waterfalls.

>> RYJIL CHRISTIANSON: Beautiful backdrop for taking kids out there and talking about anything related to the environment. That was a fun program.

I think it's important that we don't just develop programs that are pushed on communities. If you develop these great relationships and there's an open dialogue, a lot of the best programming ideas come from community members and partners.

>> MICHAEL OPHEIM: I don't think we could have a program that runs as well as it does without the help of the Pratt and the staff. They've brought so many different things to the community, different workshops that they've done, helping with different camps and things like that that we've done, and then our being able to share whatever we can. It seems like a lot of times we're asking them for help. And so any time they ask us if there's something that we can do, we're more than happy to.

>> RYJIL CHRISTIANSON: That's funny. We always feel the same way. We always feel like we're going to you way more. So it's kind of funny to hear you say that. We're always concerned we're going to you too much.

>> MICHAEL OPHEIM: Oh, never.

>> RYJIL CHRISTIANSON: It's good to hear that it's mutual, that at least we both feel like we're getting a lot out of the relationship. That's good.

We can take on big projects with creativity, with partnership. We can leverage what we have and we can leverage what they have and we can take on a lot more than we would be able to otherwise. It takes time and it takes a tremendous amount of effort, staff time, to develop relationships and trust. And we were able to do that during that grant time. We were able to put in the time and the staff to grow relationships that served us very well after that grant had run out so that now I can get people on the phone and get letters of support. But not just that. I can get help with programs when we don't have the staff. When people need things for other programs, they need museum mounts, they need artifacts to fill out a program, they can call me up and we can work together to make sure that our programs, both sides of that, it's a richer program overall and that we're serving our communities.

At the end of the Museums for America grant in 2007, we were in great shape. We had a vision value statement that guided our

programs. It matched with our master exhibit plan. It was focused around Kachemak Bay: An Exploration of People and Place. And it also tracked all of our different experiments with programming. And thanks to the reporting that took place during the grant, we had a track record. So even though new staff people came on board, they knew what had happened in those two years and what the overall mission was of the program and our institution. So it provided incredible strength and continuity.